

COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOP

Summary from the 05/22/2008 Workshop

GOALS + OBJECTIVES

The workshop began with Bob Doyle giving a presentation about the scope of the corridor study, including the project timeline and upcoming community workshop dates. The presentation discussed many of the major issues and big ideas for rethinking the Oakland / Saginaw corridor. The presentation ended by presenting a list of goals that a redesigned Saginaw / Oakland corridor should accomplish. Community participants were asked to respond to the list of goals and add others they felt were important. The composite list of goals is presented below, with the text in italics reflecting clarified or added goals from the community participants.

- *Determine and maintain traffic capacity, operations, and safety*
- Set appropriate traffic speeds
- Provide for pedestrian safety and amenity
- Accommodate bicyclists
- Accommodate mass transit and enhance rider-ship
- Enhance neighborhood quality of life
- Stimulate corridor reinvestment
- Improve visual character
- Incorporate green infrastructure solutions
- Set priorities for investment
- *Address issues of urban blight*
- *Consider impacts on crime*
- *Enhance connections to other communities and/or cities*
- *Ensure that the corridor does not create additional sprawl*

Following the Power Point presentation, community participants were asked to break into three groups and go to one of three different stations. Each of the stations focused on a different topic, which was either land use, visual character, or street and right-of-way functions. At each station, a short presentation was given to orient the community participants to the topic. The presentation was followed by an activity designed to solicit input and feedback from the participants to gauge their priorities and better understand their concerns. Groups were given 20 minutes at each station before moving on to the next, with each group participating in all three stations during the workshop.

LAND USE

At the land use station, Bob Doyle introduced the topic to workshop participants, orienting them to the base map. Each group member was given a set of dots in three colors and asked to place their dots on the map. Purple dots indicate areas where the current land uses should be preserved, green dots indicate where the land uses should be preserved but improvements are desired within the area. Red dots indicate areas where significant changes are desired.

Preservation Areas (purple dots)

Overall, the workshop participants have a strong interest in preserving land uses within the existing residential districts to the north of Oakland and to the south of Saginaw. In addition, there is a desire to preserve existing park space and many of the major institutions and public facilities along the corridor.

Consensus Locations for Preservation

- The Westside neighborhood south of Sparrow / St. Lawrence Hospital
- The Sparrow / St. Lawrence Hospital itself was identified for preservation, although some improvement to the parcel should be considered.

- Neighborhoods north of Oakland between M.L. King and North Capitol Ave.
- The character of Old Town identified for continued preservation, although it lies outside of the study corridor is a good example of the results of preservation.
- The north-south corridor that encompasses the Groesbeck Golf Course, Marshal Park, Fairview Elementary, and Catholic Central and Pattengill Middle School to the south of Saginaw.
- Neighborhood between Clemens and Lasalle on either side of Saginaw.

Improvement Areas (green dots)

Areas identified as a focus for improvement included residential neighborhoods that were the smaller “pockets” of housing surrounded by more urban or commercial land uses, as well as many of the smaller commercial nodes along the corridor. Improvements were also suggested for many of the institutional areas.

Consensus Locations for Improvement

- Sparrow / St. Lawrence Hospital identified for improvement as well as preservation.
- The commercial strip along Saginaw east of Sparrow / St. Lawrence Hospital targeted as a major zone for improvement, as well as a candidate for major change. This section extends from M.L. King to Pine Street.
- Neighborhoods “captured” or surrounded by more urbanized land uses between Oakland and Saginaw identified for improvement throughout the corridor. The major locations include the neighborhood between M.L. King and N. Capitol and directly east and west of Pennsylvania Ave.
- Improvement suggested along Saginaw from Durant Park to Oak Park, particularly at the Cedar and Larch intersections, as well as the river bridge crossings.
- Desired improvement where the schools interface with Saginaw and Oakland.
- Land north of Grand River between Woods and Foster identified for improvement.
- The vicinity around US-127 identified for improvement as well as being a major change area.

Major Change Areas (red dots)

Areas targeted for major change focused almost entirely around the non-residential urbanized areas of corridor. Other major change areas tended to be single points at specific intersections or parcels that community members found problematic.

Consensus Locations for Major Change

- Industrial district on the west end of the corridor is a major candidate for improvement.
- Major change highly desired along the commercial strip east of Sparrow / St. Lawrence Hospital. However, this desire overlaps with a strong call for improvement.
- The entire US-127 and Frandor commercial area was a second major change area. Desired changes included better buffering of the adjacent residential areas, improving traffic flows and pedestrian access, and changing the land use patterns along Clippert St.

Other Major Change Areas

- One group desired major changes along Cedar and Larch on both sides of Oakland and Saginaw. These areas were also identified for incremental improvement and some preservation with the other groups.
- Each group identified a few problematic intersections, which include Jenison + Saginaw, Saginaw + Capitol, Oakland + Prudden, Oakland + Pennsylvania, the Saginaw + Cleveland/Johnson block, Saginaw + Clemens, and Grand River + Foster.
- One group identified the east riverbank between Oakland and Saginaw as a desirable area for change.

Discussion Points

- Major change desired at both ends of the corridor, the west end being industrial, the east end being highly commercial.
- Conflict of opinion on the commercial area east of Sparrow / St. Lawrence Hospital, even within the groups. Many workshop participants advocated for improvement to the district, while others

advocated for major change. It is unclear whether those advocating for major change want to see a shift towards a different land use, or prefer a radical redevelopment of the district while still maintaining the commercial land use.

- Individual red dots were placed at many intersections that individuals felt were problematic. While not consistent between groups, the commonality between many of these intersections is that they occur where land uses shift. This suggests that emphasis should be placed on managing those transitions in a better way.

VISUAL CHARACTER

At the visual character station, Connie Dimond introduced community members to a number of visual character issues and opportunities and discussed available options for changing the character of the corridor. The session began by reviewing the issues and opportunities related to visual character with the participants and asking them to add additional ideas to the poster (these additions are shown in italics below). Afterwards, participants were asked to place dots next to the issues and opportunities they thought were most important or should have the highest priority for being addressed.

Issues + Opportunities

High Priority (many dots from all groups)

- Lack of street trees
- Encourage a more walkable mixed-use pattern
- Restore remaining traditional business area

Medium Priority (many dots for one or more groups)

- Parking dominates foreground
- Gateways + special intersections
- *More style unity between residential and commercial districts*
- *Land use transitions + buffers*
- *Commercial code enforcement*
- *Alternative curbside treatments that use stormwater*
- *Billboards + signs, allow more creative options*

Moderate Priority (one dot for two or more groups)

- Improve strip commercial model
- Cobra head street lights
- Utility poles + overhead wires
- Railroad underpasses
- Parking lacks screening, particularly when adjacent to residential areas
- *Bike bridges*

Lower Priority

- No interior parking lot landscaping
- River crossings + visual access
- *Pedestrian crossings*
- *Maintenance*
- *Single-family housing along major roads*
- *Desire for higher density development*
- *Building quality + maintenance*
- *Light industrial uses*

Visual Character Examples

While the first activity identified which issues and opportunities should be prioritized, the second activity depicted different alternatives for addressing those priorities. Another poster was presented to the community participants showing these different approaches for enhancing the visual character of the corridor, for instance alternative commercial-strip development models. Participants were again given dots and asked to place them next to the image alternatives that they most preferred.

Most Preferred / Highest Priority

- Rainwater gardens incorporated into ROW
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- Parking lot screening (image with perennials + metal fence)
- Orient buildings close to edge of street with parking in rear
- Pedestrian scaled urban spaces

Moderately Preferred / Medium Priority

- Street trees along commercial areas
- Curbed planters with street trees
- Hide overhead utilities

Slightly Preferred / Lower Priority

- Street trees in residential areas. (Likely low result because most residential areas currently have street trees.)
- Interior parking lot landscaping with rain gardens
- Lawn extension and parking lot screening
- Alternative commercial strip patterns. Only one group responded to this.
- Wide pedestrian walks. (Likely shares result with the pedestrian scaled urban space image.)

Discussion Points

- Both activities resulted in a high demand for a more walkable pedestrian scaled streetscape over improving the strip commercial land use model.
- While participants felt that parking lots tended to dominate the foreground, they did not place a lot of emphasis on either parking lot screening or interior parking lot landscaping at the issues and opportunities level. The discrepancy suggests that residents would prefer to put parking behind buildings and create a more traditional streetscape rather than rely on screening parking and using an improved strip commercial model.
- When parking lots fronting the street are required or unavoidable, a more urbanized solution that uses perennials and/or attractive fencing is preferred over wide lawn extensions and a more suburban landscaping approach. Decorative fencing has been used around some parking lots in the Old Town district to the north of the corridor.
- Two groups independently added similar points regarding inconsistent architectural styles between residential and commercial areas along the corridor, and expressed the need for better articulated transitions between land uses. The land use activity identified problematic intersections that coincide with land use shifts, reinforcing the need to rethink the character of transitions.

STREET + RIGHT OF WAY FUNCTIONS

At the street and right-of-way station, Robert Cramer introduced the different functional uses of the right-of-way and solicited input on how community members prioritized different uses. A written survey (the individual response form) asked a series of questions ranging from the identification of specific problematic intersections along the corridor to overall changes community members would like to see. A second activity used dot-voting to prioritize different right-of-way treatments.

Individual Response Form

The individual response form was a printed questionnaire completed at the start of the visioning sessions. The first two questions asked pertained to where participants lived or worked along the corridor, while the remaining four questions targeted specific issues and a strove to prioritize the many options available.

Question #3 – Most difficult pedestrian crossing

- The crossings at Cedar and Larch on Saginaw received significantly higher votes than other intersections.
- Saginaw in general is perceived as a more difficult road to cross.
- Other difficult crossings on Saginaw include MLK, Capitol, Pennsylvania, and Verlinden. Oakland and Seymour was also perceived as a moderately difficult crossing.

Question #4 – Most difficult motorist crossing

- Saginaw and MLK received significantly more votes than other intersections as a difficult motorist crossing.
- Saginaw in general is perceived as a more difficult road to cross for motorists than Oakland.
- Other significant problematic crossings on Saginaw include Fairview, Frandor, and the Cedar/Larch intersections.

Question #5 – Which issues are most important to consider

- The most important issue to consider (positive) was preserving the character of existing neighborhoods. Other important issues include enhancing the corridor's aesthetic quality, improving safety for all users, and maintaining traffic operations and flow.
- The issue with the biggest negative response was also maintaining traffic operations and flow, which suggests a conflict of public opinion regarding the use of the Saginaw / Oakland corridor as a major transit route. Participants gave lowest priority to access management.

Question #6 – One thing you could change

- Three issues were repeatedly raised by participants and received the most votes: making the roadways 2-way, increasing business development and mixed uses along the corridor, and slowing traffic.
- A secondary set of issues included a road-diet under a one-way scenario (an alternative to making the road two-way), improving the streetscape quality, and making the corridor more pedestrian and bike friendly.

Treatment of the Right-of-Way

This activity began with a discussion of different right-of-way treatments—such as adding bike lanes or on-street parking—and presented participants with a board of images relating to these different functions. Participants then dot voted for their preferred option from a subset of right-of-way treatments presented. Of the five options, adding a greenbelt or parkway feature (described as a widened vegetation strip along the roadway that includes canopy trees) to the corridor and adding bike lanes received the highest number of votes. Adding parking lanes and wider sidewalks received a lower number of votes.

SUMMARY + NEXT STEPS

Following the break-out sessions, the whole group reconvened to summarize the findings of each station. The team leaders from each station spent 3-4 minutes highlighting the commonalities across the groups and noting important differences as well (the summary remarks are covered by the discussion points above). Following this summary, Bob Johnson shared some concluding thoughts, urging everyone to stay involved in the process and bring their friends to the next community workshop!

The next workshop will be held on June 26th, and will focus on discussing possible alternative plans as well as specific evaluation criteria for assessing the performance of these different alternatives. The remainder of the summer will be spent by the project team modeling specific traffic scenarios and refining the alternatives. A subsequent community workshop is scheduled for September 4th to discuss the results of modeling and focus efforts towards pursuing a single alternative.